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THE LITTLE GYPSY.





"A day never passed without Mina's lifting her pretty little head and saying,
Papa, sing 'La Chevette.'"

THE LITTLE GYPSY.

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THE LITTLE GYPSY.

CHAPTER I.



IN a retired little village, nestling at the foot of a pretty valley of the Tyrol, lived, a century ago, a tailor called Wolf. He was a simple-minded, honest man, loving God and his neighbor. Though he had no means of support but his needle, neither he nor his family ever wanted bread; and he was even able to assist others more needy than himself, thanks to the two good geniuses which presided over his household, one of whom was called "Work," the other "Economy."

This tailor had a wife. Neat, active, industrious, and obliging, Marguerite had many excellent qualities; but, as Wolf sometimes said laughingly, "the baker had put too much yeast in the bread." It must be confessed, that if Marguerite was warm-hearted, she was also hot-headed. She sighed for rank, riches, and pleasure; and annoyed with her silly complaints the worthy Wolf, whose ambition never soared beyond the limits of his mountains. But, in spite of her faults, Marguerite was the best wife in the world; and, when she was loving and gay, Wolf quickly forgot her weaknesses of character.

Kind Providence had given this worthy couple a little girl, beautiful as an angel, lively and bright as a fairy. Mina was the joy and comfort of Wolf, and the pride of Marguerite; and all the village loved her for her grace and pretty little ways. When scarcely three years old she already warbled little ditties, which she composed herself, both words and music. But the

dance—above all, the dance—was her triumph. Waking up with the sun and the birds, little Mina would spring from her bed in her night-gown, and begin to pirouette around the room with so much grace, that Wolf and Marguerite forgot their work in looking at her ; and the passers-by stopped before the window, exhausting their whole vocabulary in finding words expressive of admiration.

Artisans, following a sedentary trade, which occupies the body more than the mind,—like weavers, seamstresses, and tailors,—are generally fond of singing, and telling stories. Owing to his frank and expansive nature, this taste was fully developed in Wolf ; only he resembled the nightingale, who never pours forth his gushes of melody except on serene spring nights, and who hides himself under the foliage when the wind is stormy. Thus the neighbors, for whom our houses are glass, and who divine every thing that passes therein, no

matter how carefully hidden, used to say, when they heard the tailor humming to himself while plying his needle, "Father Wolf is singing. Marguerite is in good humor."

Among Wolf's songs was one called "La Chevrette," which was a great favorite with little Mina. It was not a masterpiece of art. A poet of the court, or a laureate of the Academy, would have smiled disdainfully at its simplicity, and the poverty of its rhyme; but it found favor with simple-minded people, who do not despise a little flower because it has grown wild in the woods. But we will let the reader judge for himself.

LA CHEVRETTE.



Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette
Joliette ;

Hop là, sautez, mes amours,
Toujours.



Un petit berger tyrolien
Avait hérité pour tout bien
D'une chevrette
Joliette.
Ils se chérissaient tous les deux
Comme un vrai couple amoureux.
Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette, etc.



A sa voix comme elle accourait !
Elle sautait, cabriolait,

Cette chevrette

Joliette.

Dans sa main l'herbe elle broutait
Et puis à ses pieds se couchait.

Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette, etc.



Tous les bergers des alentours
Portent envie à leurs amours.

Vends ta chevrette

Joliette?

Je t'en donne un beau florin d'or . . .

Mais on ne vend pas son trésor.

Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette, etc.

Un jour, la chèvre a disparu —
Il court, il pleure : avez-vous vu

Ma Joliette,
Ma chevrette?

Si je ne puis la découvrir,
Hélas ! je n'ai plus qu'à mourir.

Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette, etc.



Ne pleure pas, petit berger,
Le vilain loup n'a pas mangé
Ta Joliette,
Ta chevrette.

Oui, le bon Dieu te la rendra,
Et ta voix encore redira :

Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette, etc.

Un soir, on frappe, pan, pan, pan :

Elle rentrait clopin-clopant,

Cette chevrette,

Joliette.

Jugez quelle fête on lui fit !

En pleurant son berger lui dit :



Ne t'en va plus au bois seulette,

Ma chevrette,

Reste fidèle à tes amours,

Toujours.



TRANSLATION.

Hop, jump, my chevrette
Joliette ;
Hop, jump, my darling,
Ever charming.

A kid was all the wealth he had,
This little Tyrol shepherd lad, —
A chevrette
Joliette.

In merry play how they doted !
Lovers ne'er were more devoted.

Hop, jump, my chevrette, &c.

At his voice she'd joyous run,
Jumping, capering, full of fun, —
 This chevette
 Joliette.
On herbage from his hand she fed,
Then at his feet laid down her head.

Hop, jump, &c.

All the shepherd lads around them,
Envious of the love that bound them,
 Tried to buy his chevette
 Joliette.
They offered him a golden florin,
But they could not win her from him.

Hop, jump, &c.

One day the little kid was gone :
In tears he ran to every one,
 For his Joliette,
 His dear chevette.
"If I no more my love descry,
There's nothing left me but to die."

Hop, jump, &c.

Do not weep, my little shepherd :
The ugly wolf has not devoured
Thy Joliette,
Thy chevrette.

Yes, God will give her back to thee,
And again thou'lt call with glee,

Hop, jump, &c.

One night, rap, rap, rap, at the door,
And she came hobbling o'er the floor, —
This chevrette
Joliette.

Oh, how joyous was the meeting !
And with tears he said, in greeting,
"Ne'er again the lone forest rove,
Be always faithful to your love !"

A day never passed without Mina's lifting her pretty little head, and saying, "Papa, sing 'La Chevrette.'" Wolf could never resist his child's winning ways; and he sang "La Chevrette," not waiting to be coaxed. Mina would listen to each couplet, stock-still, attentive, and with an ever-

growing interest; but as soon as Wolf began the refrain, —

“Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette,” —

she would dart to the floor like an arrow, and pirouette on her little legs with so rhythmic a movement, and such comical poses, that she made the old tailor cheerful for the whole day. Alas, poor man! he had then no presentiment that the story of the little Tyrolean shepherd would soon be his own. In this world, what makes us laugh to-day, often makes us cry to-morrow!



CHAPTER II.



THESE little exercises of singing and dancing were looked upon by Wolf as recreations only, which ought not to interfere with the more serious duties of a father of a family, such as the moral and religious education of the little being whom God had confided to his care. Wolf taught Mina a prayer, which she repeated morning and evening. Every Sunday, he took her to church; and, upon their return, he related to her the beautiful stories in the Old and New Testament, showing her the pictures in an old Bible, and explaining them with that good sense which always accompanies an honest mind and pure heart, filled with the love of God and man.

Mina listened attentively to her father's words. It was good seed sown in good ground.

Wolf had an even temper, and a particularly sweet disposition, which was ruffled once only during his life. Directly opposite him, in a humble cabin, lived an old woman who was called Mother Fritz. God had sorely tried her. He had taken from her in one year her husband and her two sons. It is very sad to be alone in the world, especially when one is old, poor, and feeble. In the winter, Mother Fritz gathered dead wood in the forest, to keep her warm by, and cook her scanty food. In summer, she gleaned after the harvesters, and, in bad weather, turned her wheel and spun thread, which she sold to the weavers. These resources would not have kept her from want, had she not had good neighbors, — Father Wolf, above all, who liked her, and respected her highly, for her courage and resignation.

In front of Mother Fritz's cabin was a small

garden, six feet square, surrounded with a quick-set hedge. In the midst of some sickly vegetables, and two or three stunted currant-bushes, stood a magnificent apple-tree, the branches of which bent under the weight of the fruit. It was the beginning of autumn. Little Mina looked out from her window at these tempting apples. To her the old woman's garden seemed like an earthly Paradise, which, as though it were guarded by an angel with a flaming sword, she dared not approach.

One day, when Wolf had gone to carry a coat to the farthest end of the village, and Marguerite was busy preparing dinner, Mina was seized with an irresistible longing to visit the garden. She did not at first dream of touching the apples: she wished only to look at them a little nearer. With beating heart, she crept through the thorny hedge, and found herself face to face with the object of her dreams. She stood for a moment silent with wonder and delight. "Oh, what

beautiful apples !” she cried. One in particular drew her attention ; rosy and round, it seemed to smile at her invitingly, and to balance itself — the imprudent thing ! — on the very end of a branch bending near the ground. Mina touched it, trembling : it dropped into her hand ! What was to be done ? She turned it over and over, divided between fear and desire. She smelt it with delight. From the nose to the mouth the road is not long. Very soon, like a true daughter of Eve, she bit the apple with her pretty little teeth. All of a sudden a terrible voice was heard, — “What are you doing there ?”

“Papa, I am doing nothing,” replied Mina, very much scared.

“You are telling me a lie, little thief ;” and at the same time he snatched away the apple, which she held tight in her little hand. Denial was impossible. Mina was caught with her hand in the sack, as the saying is.

“To steal from the poor is doubly wicked.”

"I will never do so again, I will never do so again," cried little Mina, clasping her hands.

Wolf seized the culprit, and was preparing to give her a correction well known to little children who misbehave themselves, when Mother Fritz all at once interposed.

"Wolf, do not whip the little one."

"But I have caught her stealing your apples."

"No matter: I give them to her. Wolf, you will really distress me very much."

"Very well; kneel down, and ask Mother Fritz's pardon," said Wolf, delighted at heart to spare Mina this mortifying punishment, without compromising the paternal authority.

"Mother—Fritz—I—ask—your—pardon," sobbed Mina, on her knees, with clasped hands.

"I forgive you with all my heart," replied Mother Fritz, embracing her. "But were my apples good?" she added, smiling.

"Oh, very good, Mother Fritz, very good!"

"Well, I will give you some when they are riper."

Wolf slipped a kreutzer in the hand of the good old woman, who refused it. He insisted.

"You surely do not wish to humble a poor old woman whom you have so often obliged."

Wolf appreciated this delicacy of feeling. He thanked Mother Fritz, and returned home with Mina.

This little scene was an event in Mina's life. It made a deep impression upon her. Far from feeling bitter toward her father, as is sometimes the case with badly disposed children, her respect and affection for him were doubled. As for Marguerite, time did not render her more reasonable. On the contrary, she was more unwise than ever. She never could find any thing too good or too dear for her child. On Sunday, when she had passed two hours in curling her hair and dressing her, she would criticise, on her way to church, all the village children they met.

One was in rags, another dressed without any taste, another had red hair and crooked legs; while Mina was a little wonder, and it broke her heart to see her doomed to vegetate all her life in the midst of a desert.

It grieved Wolf to hear his wife talk thus; and, as though struck by a sad presentiment, he said, shaking his head, "Marguerite, Marguerite, you are too proud. God will punish us."



CHAPTER III.



ONE day a troop of gypsies passed through the village. They came from Italy, and crossed the Tyrol on their way to Silesia, where, every seven years, at Pentecost, they had a meeting, presided over by their king. The band consisted of about twenty persons,—men, women, and children. A tall old man, with a magnificent white beard, bearing a long stick hooked at the end like the crosier of a bishop, towered above the rest of his companions, like a century-old oak in the midst of a forest. It was Rabba, the chief. One might have taken him for a patriarchal saint of biblical times, were it not

for a certain cast of the left eye, and a contraction of the lower lip, which showed that he was of a malicious and bantering disposition.

At his right was a tall, strapping fellow with round shoulders, rough, curly hair, and long and slender fingers. His expression was dark and unsteady, and he had all the distinctive marks of a professional thief. He looked also like a man of violent passions, which might, on occasion, turn the thief into an assassin.

Behind him marched a man of about forty, whose bright and honest physiognomy contrasted strongly with that of the rest of the troop. Petrolino was not a gypsy by birth. A child of beautiful Venice, he had, when fifteen, quitted the city of lagoons, from a love of independence and adventure; and also to escape from his father, a brutal and miserly gondolier, who gave his son more blows than bread. A mandolin, slung over his shoulder in bandoleer fashion, indicated that Petrolino was the musician of the troop.

Among the women, some of whom bore young children on their backs, whilst others dragged them by the hand, was an old hag, with a hooked nose, like a bird of prey, and a sunken eye, which at times seemed to dart sparks of fire. In her whole appearance there was something so dark and implacable (like fate itself), that she inspired even her companions with a superstitious terror. She was called Zara the Sorceress. Her trade was telling fortunes, and in this dark art she surpassed all the women of her race. Her heart was colder and more withered than a usurer's. It had one weak spot only, and that was affection for her grandson, Kokorik, a wicked scapegrace of twelve, ugly and deformed both in mind and body. One might have said that Zara loved her grandson for his wickedness. Rabba had given this little rogue the care of the ass who bore on his back the luggage of the band. The choice was a good one, I assure you. As the ass would often stop

by the way to browse, Kokorik had fashioned a stick with a very sharp point, which he dug into the flanks of the poor animal, who would resume his march, braying plaintively.

When the gypsies reached the square before the church, the chief made them a sign to halt, and all the village ran thither to see them. Mina, holding her mother's hand, gazed at them with wonder, mingled with fear. Petrolino, the man with the mandolin, played a prelude on his instrument, and presently one of the women began to sing, in a strange tongue, a song with a fantastic rhyme; the rest of the troop all joining in the refrain, while the little gypsies hopped about, uttering wild cries.

Mina, excited by the sight, dropped her mother's hand, and began to dance like the little gypsies. Petrolino, observing her, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, which attracted old Zara's attention. The sight of this charming little creature instantly suggested an evil

purpose to the wicked old sorceress. She drew near.

"Who is this beautiful child?" she asked in a honeyed voice.

"She is my daughter," replied Marguerite, with pride.

"I see on her brow signs of a great future. Give me two kreutzers, and I will reveal her good fortune."

Marguerite drew quickly from her pocket two kreutzers, which she gave to the fortune-teller. The latter took Mina's hand, and examined it in silence. Suddenly she turned to her companions, and cried to them in the gypsy tongue, —

"She has a star on the mount of Jupiter!"

These magical words passed from mouth to mouth, and all the gypsies pressed around Zara, listening attentively while she continued the horoscope.

"Jupiter . . . the sun . . . glory . . . fortune . . . an obstacle . . . overcome."

Suddenly a man made his way through the crowd. It was Wolf. He seized little Mina with one hand, and Marguerite with the other, saying to the latter, in a stern voice, "Come home."

Marguerite wished to tell her husband of the great destiny promised to their child; but Wolf interrupted her sharply.

"God only knows the future, and he designedly hides it from us. These gypsies are a miserable race, without either faith or law, who live by plunder and stealing young children."

"Let them not touch my Mina!" cried Marguerite, pressing her child to her bosom.

Neither Wolf nor his wife noticed that they were followed by a gypsy, who had left the band, and was examining at a distance the tailor's house and its neighborhood, like a kite watching the thicket into which a pretty dove has disappeared.

When Makitou returned, and rendered an account of his mission, Rabba immediately gave

the signal for departure. The gypsies halted on the edge of a coppice at a short distance from the village. Then the chief, like a good father of a family, inquired into the state of the larder. The cupboard was bare.

"Do you want to sup?"

"Yes," cried all the band, with admirable unanimity.

"Well, my children, go to market, while we old people are busy about other important matters. Kokorik, I want very much to eat a goose for supper."

"If I meet with one in the market, I will not fail to buy it for your lordship."

The women and children took their sacks and baskets, and started off.

"Do you want money?" cried the chief to them in a bantering tone.

One of the women replied by singing, —

"What he finds on his road
Belongs to the gypsy."

"Now," said Rabba to the others, — that is to say, to Petrolino, Makitou, and Zara, the old sorceress, — "take your places: the council is opened."

He seated himself with dignity on a big stone, with his staff in his hand, while his cabinet grouped themselves around him at a respectful distance.

"Do you think," said Rabba, who was the first to speak, "that it would be for the interest of our society to adopt the little creature in question?"

"Without a doubt," replied Zara. "We shall pass through many of the large cities, where it will not be safe to exercise the privileges of our order."

"Yes," said Rabba; "the police always obstinately refuse to recognize them."

"We shall therefore have to fall back on begging, telling fortunes, and performing in the public squares. The age of the little one; her

natural talents, which Petrolino will develop, — all this, I am sure, will interest the foolish crowd, and rain gold into our purse.”

“Zara is probably right,” rejoined Rabba. “The little one has all the graces of her age, — beauty and candor, — qualities which shine among us from their absence. For, betwixt you and me, our faces have character, but they are lacking in attractiveness. It is our privilege (not very flattering, it is true) to make dogs and children fly at our approach. Well, it is settled that we shall adopt the young peasant?”

“But,” timidly objected Petrolino, “if the child has a star, as Zara predicts, it is doubtful whether she will become our companion.”

At this not very complimentary objection, old Rabba knit his brows.

“What dost thou say, Master Petrolino? Dost thou, then, consider thyself so unlucky?”

“No, my lord,” replied Petrolino quickly. “You have misunderstood me.”

"I say it again," said Zara sententiously; "there is a brilliant destiny in store for the child. The stars predict for her glory, happiness, fortune; but she must first pass through terrible trials."

"Oh! well, then, that is another thing," replied Petrolino. "But how shall we get possession of the little one?"

"Nothing is easier," replied Makitou in his turn. "The tailor's house is lonely. In the middle of the night, we will break open the door, gag the father and mother, and carry off the bird."

"Scandal! violence!" exclaimed the chief; "bad means! Thou knowest, Makitou, that it is my principle to pluck the goose without making him cry out."

"As for me, I wring his neck, and then pluck him afterward."

"Makitou, thou wilt come to a bad end."

"He will be hung," said Zara: "it is written in his hand."

"Hold thy tongue, old witch! the cord which will hang me is not spun yet."

"I see the hemp sown which will serve thy executioner," replied Zara, in a sinister voice.

Makitou shuddered.

"Silence, Zara!" said the chief, sharply: "if Makitou is to be hung, he will know it soon enough."

Petrolino, absorbed in his reflections, suddenly exclaimed, "I have it: trust to me, and the lark will come herself into our net."

"Petrolino," said Rabba, "if thou succeedest, I will give thee my beautiful red mantle, which I borrowed twenty years ago from a Venetian senator."

"My lord, the mantle is mine," replied Petrolino, joyfully, who saw himself already draped in the majestic folds of that princely garment, the dream of his life for ten years.

"Here come our housekeepers from the market," said Rabba, rising abruptly to go and meet the marauders.

The women came first: one bearing a sack full of apples; another, an enormous loaf of rye-bread; a third, chickens and ducks. Kokorik trotted proudly at the head of his little companions. From the end of the stick which he carried on his shoulder hung a goose whose size drew from Rabba a cry of admiration. He gave Kokorik a sharp pinch of the ear,—his greatest mark of approbation: consequently Kokorik seemed highly flattered.

“My children,” said he to the plunderers, “I am pleased with you. Go into the woods and hide these glorious trophies from the eyes of the profane; put them on the back of our brave Rustaud [the name he had given to the ass]; then rest yourselves, if you feel so disposed, but be ready to start at the first signal. I warn you that this evening we shall sup very late. We shall have to work with our legs, before working with our jaws.”

CHAPTER IV.



IN the mean while, Petrolino had been forming his plan of campaign. He quitted the troop, accompanied by Zara and Makitou, whom he posted on the outskirts of the village, in giving them his instructions. He concealed himself behind a hedge of brushwood facing Wolf's house, so that he might watch the movements of the enemy. Petrolino was certainly not a wicked man. The course of this story will show that he even possessed noble qualities; and yet he was ready to commit, from gayety of heart, the act of a scoundrel. Strange, indeed, he would have blushed to steal a pin from Father Wolf;

yet he did not hesitate to rob him of his dearest treasure, his blood, his life; to plunge these poor people in despair, and throw an innocent creature into the midst of a band of robbers and lost women,—so surely does bad company finish at last by depraving natures naturally good.

Petrolino remained in ambush for two hours, and saw the tailor still sewing at the window, without raising his eyes from his work. The sun disappeared behind the hills: Wolf lit a lamp, and sat down again to his work with the same energy. Mina, seated by him on a little stool, looked at pictures in the old family Bible. Marguerite came and went, busy with domestic cares. Petrolino was beginning to get discouraged, when finally the door opened, and Wolf came out, carrying a bundle under his arm, and talking with Marguerite. He charged her not to leave the house, and to watch well over the child. But her husband was scarcely out of sight before Marguerite told Mina to be very

good; that she was going out to fetch some bread for supper. The truth was, she wanted to go to the neighbors, to talk over with them the fine predictions of the fortune-teller. Still she took the precaution to turn the key in the door.

Petrolino, who watched all her movements, now approached with stealthy steps, and looked in at the window. Mina was still engrossed by the pictures in the Bible. Petrolino then struck a few notes on his mandolin. Mina, astonished, at once raised her little head. Petrolino took a few steps backward, and played one of his most beautiful airs. Mina hastily opened the window, and listened with delight; but very soon the sounds grew more and more indistinct in the distance. Forgetting the cautions of her father and mother, the imprudent child jumped from the window to hear better this invisible musician, who seemed to recede the farther she advanced. Still she went on, attracted, fascinated. Sud-

denly the music ceased; tall shadows loomed up before the affrighted child, who was seized, gagged, and carried off, before she had time to utter a single cry.



CHAPTER V.



TIME passes quickly when we are talking over the predictions of a fortune-teller. On so fruitful a theme, the variations are infinite. Consequently an hour had already passed away when Marguerite took the road back to her home. "Now if only Wolf has not come back," she said to herself, quickening her steps.

She was very much astonished to see the window wide open. Pushing open the door with a trembling hand, she looked around. Mina was not there. She called: there was no reply. Wolf came in at this moment.

"Where is Mina?"

"I do not know," replied Marguerite, who was beginning to lose her wits.

"You went out?"

"A moment, to get some bread."

"Wretched woman!" cried Wolf, in despair: "my presentiment has come true."

"She is at the neighbors'."

Wolf clutched at this idea, like a drowning man at a rotten plank. Marguerite and he knocked from door to door. No one, alas! had seen the little Mina.

The whole village was thrown into a state of excitement.

"It is those cursed gypsies who have carried her off," said one.

"They have robbed my orchard," said another.

"And my poultry-yard."

"My dear little Mina, my poor spotless lamb, shall I never see you more?" cried Wolf, raising his eyes to heaven, as though appealing for succor.

As for Marguerite, with her drooping head and haggard eyes, she looked like the statue of Despair. The grief of these poor people was truly pitiable.

In the middle of a group of villagers who were talking over the events of the day was an old cottager, who by his scarred face, his proud and erect bearing, and, above all, by his wooden leg, could be easily recognized as an old soldier. He had, in fact, been in the war twenty years. In his last battle, a bullet had carried off his left leg; and the grateful state made him a present of a wooden one, which was all the benefit he reaped from his campaigns. He was a decided man, who preferred actions to words: so, after impatiently listening to the harangues of all the village orators, —

“There has been talk enough,” he said to them, curtly: “while you are all chattering at once like magpies in a field of wheat, the enemy is gaining ground. Take your pitchforks and

your sticks, and I will unhook my old musket, and we will pursue the gypsies.”

This proposition was received with shouts of approbation. The crowd dispersed, and soon returned armed to the teeth. Lighting torches of resin, the battalion fell into order of march, under the command of the man with the wooden leg.

When the little company reached the middle of a great plain, the old soldier ordered a halt, and enjoined upon his comrades the greatest silence. They listened, but heard nothing except the sound of the wind in the trees, and the plaintive cries of the owl. Marguerite called, “Mina!” “Mina!” in a heart-rending voice: the echo alone replied to her.

After wandering about in vain for several hours, they were compelled to stop; and, in spite of the entreaties of Marguerite, they turned back to the village. The next morning, the worthy peasants lent Wolf and the old

soldier horses, and the two scoured the neighborhood, questioning every one they met; but nobody had seen the gypsies. They came finally to the verge of a forest; but the old soldier convinced Wolf that it would be useless and imprudent to venture at night into the windings of such a labyrinth.

The first streaks of morning light were brightening the horizon when the travellers reached their home. When Wolf, with stricken heart, entered his poor cabin, Marguerite, crouching by the hearth, rose up like a spectre; but, seeing that he was alone, she uttered a hollow cry, and fell to the ground. But Wolf knelt down; and after having wept and prayed a long time, his forehead in the dust, he exclaimed like holy Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!"

CHAPTER VI.



It was not surprising that Wolf and his friends did not overtake the gypsies. The latter had already been marching at full speed for nearly two hours, before the villagers had thought of pursuing them. Little Mina was more dead than alive. Upon finding herself among the gypsies, she uttered at first piercing cries, calling upon her father and mother. Then the old hag beat her, swearing that she would kill her, if she cried again. After an hour of forced marching, the poor child fell, exhausted with fatigue.

"Wait a moment: I will give thee legs," said Zara, shaking her roughly.

Petrolino, moved with compassion, interposed, and took Mina in his arms. The poor child became quiet at once. She understood that God had sent her a protector. Zara marched along, muttering curses against Petrolino. She was like a snarling dog whose bone has been snatched from between his teeth.

The gypsies reached in safety the entrance of the forest. To hide from the pursuit which they had every reason to fear, they made a way for themselves through the underbrush, and soon reached an open valley, crowned by a layer of rocks, from whose height fell in cascades a stream of water, which, having worn for itself a bed, made its peaceable way through the depths of the forest. The spot looked inviting and hospitable. Old Rabba, with one glance, perceived its advantages. He cried out, in his deep voice,—

“Halt, and prepare supper. We will pass the night here.”

All the troop stopped. The ass was immediately relieved of his burden, and the poor animal, delighted to be free, shook himself a few moments, then rolled on the grass, and afterward began to graze. He had well earned his supper. A woman plucked the goose Kokorik had stolen; others searched the woods for dry branches; and, with the help of a tinder-box and a pebble (lucifer-matches were not then invented), they kindled a fire big enough to roast an ox. When the goose was plucked and drawn, it was spitted on an old rapier, which they rested on two andirons made out of sticks of wood firmly driven into the ground.

"Everybody works here, little one," said the chief to Mina. "I do not feed drones; turn the spit."

When Mina neglected to fulfil her office, the old sorceress, who was seated near her, recalled her to her duty, by a sharp rap on her fingers with a stick.

Rabba watched the curious changes produced by the fire on his favorite bird with a lively interest. When he noticed, by its beautiful golden color, and especially by the delicious fragrance which exhaled from it, that the roast was done to a turn, he ordered it to be taken from the spit. He then carved it himself with great skill; put on one side, for himself, the most succulent morsel; and royally distributed the rest to his subjects. Though Mina was very hungry, she refused to eat.

"At thy pleasure, little one," said Rabba in a bantering tone; "when we do not sup, we breakfast with better appetite."

When the edge of their hunger was appeased, their tongues were unloosed, and they naturally fell to talking over the events of the day. Petrolino was complimented by the whole band, especially by Rabba, who forgot, however, the promised reward. Petrolino ventured timidly to hint at this subject.

"Ah! ah! what a memory we have! It is very right. A sovereign must keep his word. Give Petrolino my Venetian mantle."

One of the women drew out, from among the luggage, the mantle, whose scarlet color had struggled valiantly with twenty years of a tolerably stormy career.

Petrolino did not wait until the morrow to adorn himself with his trophy. He threw it over his shoulders with the artistic taste inborn with Italians, took his mandolin, and sung one of his prettiest barcarolles, to the applause of the assembly.

"Petrolino," said Rabba, "I am pleased with thee: thou art a great artist; therefore I confide to thee the education of the new-comer. But, while I think of it, — what shall we call her?"

"La Biondina."

"Very good. The name is written on her face. La Biondina, I present to thee Petrolino, thy father."

"My father is called Wolf, and my mother Marguerite, and I am Mina," replied she, with a spiteful air, so comical that all the gypsies, Rabba among them, burst into a loud laugh.

"Little one, listen attentively to what I am going to say to thee," rejoined Rabba, when silence was restored. "There is no longer any Mina, nor Wolf, nor Marguerite. Thou wert born among us. Thy name is La Biondina, and thy father's is Petrolino. Try hard to get this new pedigree into thy head, or we will introduce it by means which will not be to thy taste."

This little warning was pronounced in a dry and decided tone, which admitted of no reply. As a criminal who has just heard his sentence of death, Mina felt all her strength deserting her.

"And now, my children," said Rabba, with a most paternal accent, "we shall start to-morrow at break of day. Sleep with clinched fists, and one ear open, like true children of Bohemia. Ah!" added he, after a pause, "give your mat-

tresses a good shaking; for as you make your bed, so you must lie."

Rabba had always ready some little witticism. He tempered by pleasantry the severity of his government. With him this system worked well.

The gypsies, accustomed to sleep in the open air, were not long in making their beds. Mina sat leaning against a tree, silently weeping, and thinking of her father and mother. Kokorik, who was passing, stopped before her.

"Good-evening, La Biondina: have no bad dreams, La Biondina," said he, with a malicious chuckle.

Poor Mina was too sad to be disturbed by the fun of this wicked boy. She knelt down, and, with clasped hands, repeated, in a low voice, the little prayer which her father had taught her. At this moment, Petrolino, who was stalking about proudly in his fine scarlet mantle, seeking a place in which to pass the night, saw, by the rays of the moon, little Mina leaning against a

tree, her teeth chattering with cold. Fright, hunger, fatigue, had put her into a fever.

The sight touched Petrolino. Heaving a sigh, he took from his shoulders the good mantle in which he had contemplated sleeping like a prebendary, and wrapped up Mina in it. Thanks to the amplitude of the stuff, he saw, with a very pardonable satisfaction, that there was still enough to cover him from head to foot.

"After all, it is my pupil, almost my daughter," he said to himself. "It is only right that I should take care of her."

"How kind you are, thank you!" repeated Mina, several times, in a touching voice.

"She has a heart, this little one,—and what a charming voice! If we try, we shall make something out of it."

Petrolino fell asleep with this idea, which was the cause of some fantastic dreams.

Thanks to the comfort of the mantle, and the confidence which her new friend inspired;

thanks, above all, to that mutability which was one of the blessings of her age, — Mina soon fell into a deep sleep. She was dreaming of going to church with her father and mother, in her beautiful Sunday clothes, — when she was recalled to the sad reality by the sharp voice of old Zara, who cried to her, while roughly shaking her, —

“Come, come, get up, you lazybones!”

Sleep had taken away her fatigue, but had not filled her little stomach. She could not help saying, in a low voice, “I am very hungry.”

Rabba heard her.

“Ha, ha! the open air has given us an appetite. Hold, here is bread, — eat; and there is wine,” said he, pointing to the stream, — “drink from the very cask.”

Mina devoured her piece of bread, drank several draughts of the water which she dipped up in the hollow of her hand, and very soon all the band, at a sign from the chief, resumed their tramp.

CHAPTER VII.



OWARD noon the gypsies halted once more in the forest for food and a little rest. The repast over, as the weather was dull and cloudy, they lay down and were soon asleep. Mina, who thought of nothing but escaping, deemed this a favorable time. She threw an anxious look over her companions. They were all lying on the grass, motionless, with closed eyes and in the oddest postures. She listened : the chorus of sleep was being executed to the life in snores, beginning with the sharp soprano of Kokorik, and ending with the powerful bass of Rabba. This music gave her perfect confidence. She got up on tip-toe, cleared lightly the circle made by

the gypsies, and ran with all the power of her little feet. She already thought herself safe, when old Zara, who always slept with one eye open, suddenly cried out, —

“Quick, quick! La Biondina is escaping.”

The gypsies were on their feet in a trice, and pursuing the little fugitive. But, impeded by the underbrush, they saw with rage their prey about to escape them, when Kokorik began to throw stones. One of them struck poor Mina, who, uttering a cry, stumbled and fell. She was soon seized by the terrible old witch, and, by Rabba's orders, was whipped as never child was whipped ever since there have been children and sorceresses in the world.

Petrolino hung his head in sadness during this cruel scene. Poor Mina's cries went to his heart; but he did not dare protest against a correction which he thought deserved. A long sojourn among the gypsies had somewhat warped the ideas of the worthy Petrolino respecting



"Quick, quick! La Biondina is escaping." — PAGE 52.

justice and injustice. He possessed in the highest degree what is called *esprit de corps*; and, among gypsies more particularly, *esprit de corps* is not exactly the spirit of the gospel.

"My poor Biondina," said Petrolino, when the caravan resumed its march, "thou seest that such ill-timed pranks cost dear. Trust me, do not try them again. The arms and legs of the gypsies are much longer than thine; they will reach thee at any distance. Be patient: thou wilt in time get used to our vagabond life. It has its charm."

He then told her about all the countries he had traversed, from Venice to Constantinople and from Constantinople to Cadiz; in passing through Southern Russia, Poland, Germany, the Low Countries, France, and Spain. He was himself the hero and poet of this Odyssey, full of incidents, which were sometimes droll, sometimes dramatic. Mina, who knew nothing of the world, listened to this graphic recital with a

simple eagerness, which flattered prodigiously the little vanity of Petrolino.

Thanks to these interesting talks, and the songs intermingled with them, and more particularly to the paternal care she felt Petrolino extended over her, Mina became insensibly used to her adventurous life. But, happily, the conversation and unchristian example of her associates left no evil impression upon her mind, strengthened as it was by the moral and religious education which she had received from her father, as the following instance proves :—

One day, in their route through a village, the gypsies passed by a pretty country house, the garden of which was inclosed by high walls. Among the trees whose branches hung over the roadside was a superb apple-tree, laden with tempting fruit, but hanging so high that it only tantalized the thirsty passers-by. Not being able to gather the fruit, the gypsies tried to bring it down with stones; but the apples, indignant,

doubtless, at so brutal a proceeding, determined not to budge.

Zara then said, turning to Makitou, —

“The wise man has said, If the mountain will not come to thee, go thou to the mountain. Makitou, take La Biondina on thy shoulder: she can climb up on the wall, and throw us the apples.”

“That is a good idea, and I will act upon it,” said Makitou, stooping to take up Mina; but she recoiled, crying out with indignation, —

“I am not a thief.”

These words were greeted with a loud burst of laughter; in the opinion of the gypsies they were so delightfully innocent. Makitou made another attempt to get hold of Mina.

“No,” she said, in a resolute tone; “you shall kill me rather.”

She was ever hearing, resounding in her ear, the terrible voice of her father when he caught her in Mother Fritz’s garden.

Old Zara, furious at this resistance, seized the child by the arm, and raised her hand to strike her, when Petrolino sprang toward the hag, and snatched from her her victim.

"If thou touch a hair of her head, I will strangle thee, old hag."

"What, wretch ! dar'st thou threaten me?"

"I will defend La Biondina against thee, and against everybody," added Petrolino, looking savagely at all his astonished companions.

"Dost thou hear him?" said the sorceress to old Rabba, who came running at the noise. "It is the end of the world: see, the lambs are revolting!"

"The lambs are at last getting tired of being eaten by the wolves."

In a dry, imperative tone, the chief imposed silence upon the two opponents, and cited them before his tribunal. Zara spoke first, and declared that Petrolino was spoiling La Biondina, who was becoming an unbearable child, useless

to the society whose usages and fundamental laws, &c., she despised.

Petrolino did not attempt to answer her long accusation. He merely said, that, as the education of La Biondina had been confided to him, he was not willing that Zara should injure his pupil, and ruin her delightful voice, by continually making her cry.

After having listened religiously to both parties, old Rabba thought a moment, and then in a loud voice pronounced the following judgment:—

“Considering the subject from one point of view, Petrolino is right; from the other, Zara is not wrong. Wishing to render to each good and equal justice, we hereby order and command that Petrolino is to have, at his own risk and peril, the sole charge of La Biondina’s education, and that all others be forbid to correct or strike his pupil, under the severest penalties.

“For every infringement of our order of which

La Biondina may be guilty, Petrolino is to receive blows with a stick, of which we, in our wisdom, will fix the number. If, by any neglect of Petrolino, La Biondina escape, the punishment will be trebled."

This judgment, worthy of Solomon, was received by the whole band with enthusiastic cheers. Petrolino, a little disconcerted, scratched his ear; then, moved by a generous impulse, he said, —

"I accept the judgment. . . . Now, my darling Biondina, I am at thy mercy; but, by my patron St. Mark, take a little pity on my poor shoulders!"

Mina was touched by this devotion of the kind Petrolino, and promised to make no more attempts to escape.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE winter, heralded by its usual couriers, winds and storms, came on apace. From time to time, long lines of storks were seen flying through the air, on their way to warm themselves by the sun of Egypt; while geese and wild ducks swooped down on the lakes and marshes, bearing on their wings the snow and ice of the north. Sighing, the trees cast off their last dry leaves, and seemed to pity themselves for being so unprotected against the approach of the terrible winter. Poor Mina might be compared to these melancholy trees. She had lost on the route her pretty red and white cheeks and charming plumpness, which were the pride of her

mother. Her shoes, worn out by the long journey, threatened to leave her altogether, and her ragged clothes no longer protected her against the wind and rain. Mina suffered in silence, for fear of grieving still further the kind Petrolino, who, in looking at her from time to time, exclaimed, "Poverina! Poverina!"

Petrolino cherished for his little *protégé* quite a paternal affection. His naturally soft heart, which had been forced back upon itself, like a sensitive plant, by contact with his coarse and cynical companions, expanded with delight under the influence of this sweet creature, whose caressing voice said so prettily, "Thank you, friend Petrolino."

When Mina's shoes gave out wholly, Petrolino, not wishing her to walk with bare feet, took her up bravely in his arms, in spite of her remonstrances and the jeers of the gypsies, and carried her to the nearest market-town, where Rabba had decided to pass the night.

Petrolino took advantage of this halt to attend to Mina's wardrobe. He first bought her a pair of good shoes, and then proceeded to a tailor's shop.

"Could you cut me a cloak for the little one out of this?" said he, taking off his mantle.

"What ! this?" replied the tailor, after having spread out that magnificent product of Venetian industry; "why, there is enough here to clothe a whole family."

"Very well; set to work. I must have the cloak this very night. Here is money;" and he drew a gold piece from his pocket.

"Pshaw, master! you do not give me time to breathe; but you shall be obeyed, for, in cold like this, such a garment will not be a luxury. Come, wife, lend me a hand."

The tailor's wife, while helping her husband, could not keep her eyes off of Mina, whose sweet and sad expression, and poor little frock in rags, impressed her painfully.

"Is she your child?" she said at last to Petrolino.

"Yes."

"Has she lost her mother?"

"Yes."

"Poor child."

Mina, touched already by the aspect of the dwelling, which reminded her of her own home, could not restrain her tears. Petrolino chided her gently, and made her sit near the stove to warm herself.

"Hermann," said the tailor's wife to him in a low voice, "suppose I gave this little girl the last frock of our dear Lisbeth?"

"I was thinking of that," quietly replied the worthy man.

Mina was very soon dressed from head to foot in Lisbeth's clothes. The white underclothing, the good woollen garments, warmed her body, while the caresses and kind words of Mistress Hermann warmed her heart. When supper was

served, Petrolino and Mina were invited to partake of it. Hermann and his wife did the honors with delightful good humor. Nothing gives so much gayety of spirit as content with one's self. To recompense his hosts while they were working for him with so much energy, Petrolino took his mandolin, and sang some of his prettiest barcarolles. When the cloak was done, and put on Mina's shoulders, the good people would not take even one kreutzer, in spite of Petrolino's entreaties. They parted with tears in their eyes, as though they had known one another always. Kind-hearted people are all born friends. It is friend meeting friend again, not strangers accidentally encountering each other.

It was late when Petrolino and Mina left the tailor's house, and they made haste to rejoin their companions. On the way, Mina could not help scolding her friend.

"Thou saidst that I was thy daughter, and that my mother was dead. Thou know'st that

that is not true, friend Petrolino: it is wicked to lie."

Petrolino blushed, and stammered out some excuses; for he felt within himself that these reproaches were just. Mina was becoming his living conscience, and he was trying to make himself better to please her.

When they entered the barn which served the gypsies for a lodging, the latter were already asleep. When morning came, Rabba gave the signal for departure, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole band were on their feet. Mina's brilliant metamorphosis was then perceived, and called forth a cry of surprise and of admiration, which was more or less ironical.

"See," said one, "Petrolino's mantle, which has been made into two smaller ones!"

"Shoes, white linen! Have you been robbing the daughter of a prince?"

"Oh, how very funny!" cried Kokorik. "It is like an old lobster giving his claw to a cray-fish."

This very graphic witticism excited a general laugh. Petrolino, without being put out of countenance, scanned from head to foot this ugly, deformed little ape, ragged and dirty, and said to him, with a very serious air, —

“Kokorik, my friend, when we have the good fortune to be a handsome fellow, with good relatives who bathe and perfume us every day, and dress us in silk and velvet, we should not make fun of poor people, ill-favored by nature and fortune; my charming little Kokorik, that is not generous.”

This time Petrolino had the laugh on his side: all looks were turned toward old Zara, the neglectful grandmother of the dirty and wicked scapegrace called Kokorik. Petrolino's pleasantry was too apt, not to wound the sorceress. She was furious, and poured forth a torrent of abuse, mingled with oaths, against all the world in general, and poor Mina in particular, who was, however, the only one who had not laughed.

At last, Rabba flourished his big staff, and said with a terrible gesture, —

“Silence, all of you! I will knock down the first who says a word.”

All the gypsies were dumb as by enchantment; and the troop, becoming silent, resumed their tramp northward.



CHAPTER IX.



THE winter set in with extreme severity; so Mina's new clothes were verily a providential gift. It was the middle of December: the snow fell in great flakes, and covered the country like an immense shroud. The troop were obliged to go through a forest of fir-trees by night. For some time, a band of famished wolves followed them, howling fearfully. Rabba, who was an able and prudent leader, had the women and children put in the centre of the troop, while he and Makitou marched in the rear, the post of danger. He then broke out into a martial song, all the gypsies joining in the chorus. This warlike device was a grand suc-

cess at first. The wolves halted, astonished and undecided, when, unfortunately, the ass, who was trembling in every limb, thinking, no doubt, to give himself courage, mingled his untimely brayings with the chant of the gypsies. The wolves answered him by significant howls, and immediately started off again at a furious gallop.

"They have scented Rustaud," said Makitou to Rabba: "we are lost!"

"Take the burden off the ass, and run as if the police were after you."

The luggage was taken off in a flash, and the unhappy ass abandoned to the fury of the wolves; while the frightened gypsies ran through the snow and brambles as fast as their legs could carry them. They heard from afar, along with the howls of the wolves, the despairing braying of their poor companion, who seemed calling upon them to come to his succor. This frightful struggle was soon followed by a lugubrious silence.

The gypsies were just thinking themselves safe, when a vague noise of many feet, trotting behind, met their ears. It was the wolves, who, having devoured their prey, had resumed the chase with greater ardor, allured on by the smell and taste of blood. The danger was now greater than ever. The old sorceress, who detested Mina, said, in the gypsy tongue, to Rabba and Makitou, —

“We must make another sacrifice to necessity. La Biondina is of no use to us: let us give her to the wolves, and, by that time, we shall have got out of the forest.”

Mina, who now understood a little of the language, heard this horrible proposition. Full of fright, she pressed nearer to her friend Petrolino, who took her up in his arms, and, turning toward Zara, said to her, in a fearful voice, —

“I will defend La Biondina against both wolves and witches.”

Fortunately they very soon reached the end

of the forest; and, the day beginning to dawn, the wolves, who, like the wicked, fear the light, suddenly halted, gave a few howls, and, turning about, disappeared in the depths of the forest.



CHAPTER X.



VERY thing passes in life, evil days as well as good days. After the winter comes the spring. On one of those warm mornings in the month of March, when the sun seems bent upon proving to the world that he is no longer frozen, the gypsies rested on the outskirts of a little wood. Petrolino gave a singing and dancing lesson to Mina, who went through with her various exercises to the great satisfaction of all the spectators, and particularly Rabba.

Not far off, at the foot of a little hill, a flock of sheep were dozing in the sun. Both shepherd and dog were doing the same.

"Kokorik," said Zara to her grandson, "if thou art not a blockhead, we shall eat roast lamb for our supper."

"Kokorik will show that he is not a blockhead, grandmother."

So saying, Kokorik, with stealthy step, crept along the edge of the wood. He had already got his eye on a pretty little lamb, very plump and fat, sleeping near its mother, secure in the presence of the dog and the shepherd. But, when innocence sleeps, Providence watches. Mina had divined the plot between the sorceress and her grandson; she pitied the poor sheep, and wanted to save them from the wicked clutches of Kokorik; so, just as Kokorik, who had wriggled through the grass like a snake, was in the act of springing on his prey, she began to sing, in her most vibrating voice, —

"Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette."

The effect was magical. Dog, shepherd,

sheep, awoke with a jump. Kokorik was already in full flight, bearing on his shoulders a lamb whose piteous bleatings were soon mingled with those of its mother and the whole flock. The dog sprang after the thief, and seized him behind by the flesh as well as the trousers.

Like the young Spartan, Kokorik held on to his prey in spite of the pain, when a shower of blows from a stick, raining down on his head and back, made him relinquish his prize and take again to his heels, uttering frightful howls.

Zara was furious, and attacked Mina, before even thinking of going to the assistance of her grandson; for, with this wicked woman, hate was far stronger than love.

"Biondina, little wretch, I'll strangle thee!" cried the fury.

But Petrolino, who, since the adventure in the forest, never lost sight of Zara's movements, seized her stout arm on its passage, and held

her tight against a tree, demanding justice. Rabba, who understood perfectly how useful La Biondina would be to them in the great cities through which they were to pass, sentenced the witch to receive fifty blows of the stick. They tied her to a tree, and were about to administer the punishment which she had justly merited, when Mina, moved with compassion, threw herself on her knees at the feet of the astounded Rabba, and with tears implored pardon for Zara.

"So be it. I grant it thee in consideration of the pleasure thou hast lately given me. And thou, old hag," added he, addressing Zara, "try to be a little more moderate in future, and do not forget, that, if thy bones are still in their place, it is to La Biondina thou owest it."

The gypsies arrived at Darmstadt in the early part of April, without any other incident worthy of note. Their entrance into the city created quite a commotion; all the children of the sub-



"Mina began a Venetian barcarolle, which was a complete success." — PAGE 75.

urbs, attracted by the sight, followed them with acclamations of joy to the market-place, which was the theatre chosen for the first appearance of *La Biondina*. Old Rabba, and those of the gypsies who took no part in the representation, sat down around their luggage. Makitou and Kokorik were the ushers, and had a great deal of trouble in disposing the spectators so as to form a circle, in the centre of which the artists were to perform in full view.

When Petrolino struck a prelude on his mandolin, all the windows on the square were thrown up as by enchantment. The entertainment began with a wild gypsy chorus. Then Petrolino bent toward his young pupil, and whispered two words in her ear. As soon as he had struck a note on his mandolin to give her the key, Mina began a Venetian barcarolle, which was a complete success. Bravos resounded through the place, accompanied by a shower of big pennies and silver pieces, which

Kokorik, catching with a dexterity that would have done honor to an ape, laid respectfully at the feet of the venerable Rabba, without pilfering even one of them.

An attentive observer, looking around the place at this moment, would have noticed, at one of the windows of an old house, two children eight and ten years old, who followed the performances with a lively and childish interest. Behind them, sharing his children's pleasure, stood a man about forty. He had a bright eye, and a mild and intelligent expression. It was their father, Master Cornelius, a composer of music, who needed only opportunity to become distinguished. While waiting for fame and fortune, this poor man of genius was forced to give lessons, at a very modest price, to support his family. The barcarolle which Mina had just sung delighted him.

"What a delicious voice!" he said to his wife, who was knitting at another window, while

following the performances with her eyes.

"But that child is not of the gypsy type."

"It is no doubt a stolen child."

"Poor parents! how they must have suffered at losing so lovely a creature! But I am forgetting my lesson. Wilhelmina, watch well over the children."

Cornelius kissed Bertha and Frederic, gave a kind shake of the hand to his wife, took his hat and cane, and left by the garden-door to avoid the crowd in the place, which was becoming more and more dense.

Petrolino, proud of Mina's success, now began to play a dancing-tune, whilst regarding the public with an air which seemed to say, "You are charmed, my dear friends: you shall be amazed presently,—subjugated, transported, or Petrolino is nothing but a rascal."

Petrolino was not mistaken. The tarantella was La Biondina's triumph. First, she balanced herself on her little feet, in careless and graceful

attitudes; then, the movement becoming more lively, she turned and turned, as though she were growing dizzy, and this with such a feeling for rhythm, and a pantomime so expressive, that all the spectators stood motionless, with gaping mouths and staring eyes.

Among the warmest admirers of the little damsel was a portly personage, whom everybody treated with deference. He wore a powdered wig, a cocked hat, and a coat embroidered with wide gold lace. He leant on a big cane with an ivory knob, and from time to time drew from the pocket of his flowered silk waistcoat a beautiful gold snuff-box, from which he took snuff with dignity.

Makitou had noticed this magnificent personage, and especially his gold snuff-box. Gold on Makitou had the magnetic influence of the loadstone on iron. It attracted him fatally. Under pretext of arranging the crowd, he contrived to post himself near the grand gentleman;

and taking advantage of a moment when the latter, leaning on his cane, was most absorbed by the giddy dance of La Biondina, he insinuated his long, tapering fingers into the half-open pocket of his neighbor, and slowly drew out the snuff-box. At the same instant, he felt himself seized by an iron grip, and a rough voice cried out to him, —

“Ha, thief! I have got thee.”

The unlucky man was not aware he had been meddling with a burgomaster *in propria persona*, and that that respectable magistrate was accompanied by a policeman, whose practised eye had at once suspected the gypsy's designs, and was watching to catch him in the act.

“Well, Pinceman, what's the matter?” said the burgomaster, in the querulous tone of an honest man disturbed in his pleasures.

“It is a miserable man, my lord, who has just stolen your snuff-box.”

The burgomaster fumbled quickly in the

pocket of his waistcoat, and, naturally, did not find his box there.

"All these gypsies are thieves ! Take that fellow off to prison !"

The performances were interrupted. The crowd was thrown into excitement; and the gypsies, seeing their comrade led off, vied with each other in crying out, "Mercy, my lord, mercy !"

Everybody inquired what the matter was.

"It is a gypsy who has stolen the burgomaster's snuff-box."

"It is something like it, for they are taking him off to prison."

These words, "thief," "prison," sounded again and again in the ears of the little Mina. She was in a panic of terror. Instinctively throwing on her cloak, she glided through the crowd, unnoticed in the uproar; and, quitting the market-place, she flew through the streets and suburbs. Gaining the public road after an hour of this wild running, she fell fainting at the foot of a tree.

CHAPTER XI.



FTER his lessons were over, Cornelius took a walk out of the city, thinking, on the way, of the oratorio which he was composing for Holy Thursday. Night coming on made the musician quickly remember that he was the father of a family. So he turned homeward ; and, as he was hurrying along that he might not be late for supper, he stumbled suddenly over an obstacle. He stopped and looked. It was a child. Is it dead or alive? Moved with compassion, he raised the little creature. "I am not mistaken : it is the little gypsy. She is not asleep : she has fainted,—from fatigue and hunger, no doubt."

A stream was running near by. Cornelius dipped his handkerchief in it, and bathed the forehead and cheeks of the child, who very soon came to herself, and looked about her with fear and amazement.

“Do not be afraid, little one. I am a friend.”

In so speaking, he took up the child in his arms, covered her with his cloak, and went on toward the city. Mina, perfectly re-assured, put her little arms around the neck of her new friend, and finished by dropping off to sleep. Cornelius reached home with his soft burden.

“What are you bringing us, papa ?”

“Look,” he replied, opening his cloak. “How pretty she is! Why, it is the little gypsy we saw to-day.”

Cornelius then told how he had found her on the public road, where she had fainted, under a tree, how he had brought her back to consciousness, &c.

The children cried in listening to the story.

Wilhelmina took Mina on her lap, pulled off her shoes, and sent Bertha into the kitchen to fetch a cup of warm milk, which Mina drank at one draught, without opening her eyes. They laid her, still asleep, on the sofa; and all the little family went joyfully in to supper.

When Bertha and Frederic had gone to bed, Cornelius and his wife returned to the drawing-room. Mina was still asleep. Wilhelmina sat down to work by the light of a lamp; Cornelius placed himself at his harpsichord, to finish the last part of his oratorio, in which saints and patriarchs sang, with the angels, the risen Christ.

Cornelius had already expended considerable labor on this important part, without ever succeeding in satisfying himself. But, his sensibility being excited by the events of the day, he composed this evening with peculiar felicity. Mina was awakened by the sublime harmony; on her knees, with clasped hands, and eyes glistening with tears, she listened as though under

the spell of a vision. When Cornelius had finished, Wilhelmina made him a sign to look at Mina. He was astonished at the effect produced by music on one so young; and, with the sudden inspiration of genius, he said, —

“Wife, that child will one day be a great artist.”



CHAPTER XII.



THE first thought of Frederic and Bertha, on waking the next morning, was of the little gypsy. They dressed themselves quickly, and entered their mother's chamber. She was busy with her maid looking over Bertha's clothes, to find something that would do for little Mina to wear. After having said "Good-morning" to their mother, the two children approached the bed where Mina was lying.

"Be careful not to wake her," said Wilhelmina, in a low voice.

"Oh! we will not make any noise."

They went up on tiptoe, and drew the curtains. Mina, who was not asleep, gazed at them at first

a little frightened, but their kind, innocent little faces soon re-assured her, and she ended by giving them a sweet smile.

"Mamma, she is not asleep," cried both the children at once.

"You have waked her."

"No, mamma."

Wilhelmina approached the bed, and said to Mina, —

"Have you slept well, little one?"

"Yes, madam," she replied, timidly.

"What is your name?" said Bertha.

"Mina."

"Mina! what a pretty name! I am called Bertha; and my brother, Frederic."

"You worry her," said Wilhelmina, smiling.
"Go, now, and say your prayers, and study your lessons before breakfast.

The children retired directly; for they were very obedient, and tried always to please their mother.

A bath had been prepared for Mina, who was greatly in need of it; for gypsies are not famous for cleanliness. Wilhelmina noticed with surprise the black and blue marks on the delicate white skin of the little girl.

“Have you had a fall, my child?”

“No: it was old Zara, who was always beating me.”

“Poor little one!” sighed the good Wilhelmina.

When Mina had taken her bath, they put clean under-clothing on her, a pretty frock, shoes and stockings, and combed out her beautiful light hair. Her toilet was scarcely completed, when breakfast was announced, at which Mina greatly rejoiced; for she was very hungry, though she was too timid to say so.

Her entrance into the dining-room was hailed with shouts of joy and admiration. A seat was given her at the table between Cornelius and Wilhelmina, who were occupied only in serving

her. Frederic and Bertha, too, forgot to eat in looking at the little gypsy.

When breakfast was over, Cornelius took Mina on his knee.

"What is your name, little girl?" he said.

"The gypsies called me La Biondina; but Mina is my real name."

"So, then, you were not born among the gypsies?"

"Oh no, sir!" Saying this, her voice faltered, and big tears started to her eyes.

"They carried me off by force, and dragged me along with them. Oh, only send me back to my father and mother, and God will bless you!"

And she clasped her little hands, and looked so beseechingly at Cornelius, that the whole family were moved to tears.

"Be comforted, my dear Mina: we will send you back to your parents."

"Let us start immediately."

"I should like to do so, but where do they live?"

"In the village."

"But what village? what is it called?"

"Why, the village! There are houses there, a pretty little church, fine trees; and opposite my father's house is Mother Fritz's garden."

This information did not seem very satisfactory to Cornelius, who tried to get at something a little more definite.

"Did you do much walking before coming here?"

"Oh yes!"

"How many days?"

"I do not know."

"But these gypsies have not left the city: perhaps I can find out through them."

"Oh, do not send me back with them!" cried she, trembling; "they are so wicked,—the old woman above all. She was always beating me."

"Do not be afraid," said Cornelius: "we will keep you here until we have found your parents. You would like to stay with us, little Mina?"

"Oh yes!" replied Mina, with a charming simplicity: "with them I was in misery; with you I am happy."



CHAPTER XIII.



IT occurred to Cornelius, who had heard from his wife of the arrest of the gypsy who had stolen the burgo-master's snuff-box, that he might, by means of a bribe, learn from the prisoner the name of the village whence Mina had been stolen. He put on his best coat, and proceeded to the town-hall to get a permit from the burgo-master to visit the jail. He found that respectable magistrate in a towering rage with the jailer, for which, however, he had good cause, as the man had just told him that his prisoner had escaped during the night, and the whole band of gypsies had disappeared like magic.

"Well, it is no use of thinking about it any

more," said Cornelius to himself, as he retraced his steps. "We have lost the only chance of finding out Mina's parents, and we shall be obliged to keep the poor child with us. What an unfortunate circumstance!"

If the good Cornelius had probed his conscience, he might perhaps have been surprised to find that this "unfortunate circumstance" filled him with secret satisfaction, because he had already become singularly attached to the little gypsy.

"She wept in listening to my oratorio!" he repeated over and over again to himself.

He troubled himself little about the additional expense, and that he had already hard work to make both ends meet.

"I will work a little harder, and then my oratorio will be a success, — something tells me so."

On reaching home, he told his wife of the escape of the prisoner, and the disappearance of the gypsies.

"Now, what are we going to do with the poor child?" added he, trying to read the mind of Wilhelmina.

At this moment, Mina came in from the garden with Bertha and Frederic; they seemed the best friends in the world.

"My children," said Wilhelmina, in looking at her husband, "you will now have a new little sister."

Bertha and Frederic jumped with joy at these words, and Cornelius affectionately pressed his wife's hand; she had read his heart.

"Now, my little Mina," said Cornelius, "you have nothing more to fear from those miserable gypsies; it will be a long while before they will dare to pass through our good city of Darmstadt again."

"Oh dear! what have I done?" exclaimed Mina all at once. "Poor Petrolino! he will be beaten for me. I was so happy here, I forgot every thing. Petrolino was always so kind; he

will think I am a bad child. I want to go back to him, so that they will not kill him. Oh dear ! oh dear !”

Mina was so excited, that it was a long time before Cornelius and his wife could get any reasonable explanation of her strange conduct. When the poor child became calmer, she told them of Petrolino’s devotion ; how, many times, he had rescued her from the clutches of the wicked sorceress ; and of the decree of the gypsy chief, which rendered Petrolino responsible for her behavior, and of her solemn promise never to run away, and how she had been betrayed into breaking that promise.

While admiring the acuteness of Mina’s feelings, Cornelius tried to make her understand that her scruples were exaggerated, and that Petrolino was relieved of all responsibility by late events ; and that, besides, the gypsies were too far off to be overtaken.

All these reasons did not satisfy fully the tender

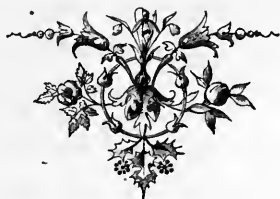
conscience of Mina, who, for a long time, was troubled lest the terrible sentence of Rabba would be executed on poor Petrolino. But the care and tenderness of Cornelius and his good wife, the pleasant friendship of Frederic and Bertha, very soon softened her childish remorse; and she gave herself up to the charm of a pure and tranquil life, so well suited to her sweet and affectionate nature.

In the mean time, by the blessing of God on their kind action, every thing prospered with the good people. The oratorio of Cornelius was performed before all the court on Holy Thursday, and so successfully, that the Landgrave appointed him precentor of the court chapel, with a salary of six hundred florins. Good fortune is like misfortune : she never comes alone. She is a magnificent personage, who puts herself to very little trouble, but who is always accompanied by a numerous train. Before the success of his oratorio, Cornelius ran after his scholars ;

but, when that was insured, scholars ran after him. Still, prosperity, as it often does, did not change him : he was ever the same, — a simple-hearted, kind man. He exerted himself even more than ever. "Good fortune makes it incumbent upon me," he would say to his wife, who was sometimes forced to moderate his zeal. Looking upon himself as Mina's adopted father, he also busied himself with her education, which had been much neglected among the gypsies. To Bertha was committed the care of teaching her to read, sew, and embroider. Frederic taught her to write and draw ; for Cornelius knew by experience, that the best way to learn any thing one's self is to teach others. Her musical education he reserved for himself as a recreation from his labors.

Mina made such rapid progress, that she did not seem learning, but recollecting. In less than a year, she knew as much as her little teachers ; and music she could read at sight. For Corne-

lius' birthday, she studied in secret a fugue of his composition, which she played with so much skill, that she drew tears from the eyes of her friend and master.



CHAPTER XIV.



URING the next two years, nothing extraordinary happened ; but the winter of the third year was a memorable one in the annals of the family. The Landgrave had ordered his precentor to compose, for the Christmas festival, an oratorio, to be performed at the court theatre. Cornelius had been two months occupied with the rehearsals. Christmas was approaching, and the master was not entirely satisfied with the way his work was rendered. For the scene in which the angels announce to the shepherds the birth of a Saviour, Cornelius had written a solo which he regarded justly as a gem. To sing this solo

properly, required a real angel ; and angels are rare in this world, and, above all, at the theatre. The young girl upon whom the *rôle* devolved was not suited to it, either in person or in voice. The latter was entirely wanting in charm, and all Cornelius' instructions were lost upon one so poorly endowed by nature. At the last general rehearsal, he came away in despair. Entering his wife's chamber, he threw himself into an easy-chair like a man who had just heard his death-sentence. While the kind Wilhelmina was trying to encourage him, a voice, which seemed to issue from the adjoining room, began to sing the unfortunate solo, and in so pure and sympathetic a manner, that Cornelius half rose from his arm-chair, and listened without drawing a breath, like one under the spell of a vision. When the voice ceased, he threw open the door, and saw Mina standing before the harpsichord. He made one bound toward the little musician, and said to her, all in a tremor, —

"Mina, this solo you have just sung, could you have the courage to sing it to-morrow before the Landgrave and the whole court?"

"Yes, dear friend, if it would give you pleasure," replied Mina, very quietly.

"Come, sing it again," rejoined Cornelius, placing himself at the harpsichord.

He made her repeat the solo twice, in giving her some instructions; then he rapturously embraced the child, and said to his wife, "I am saved!"

He took his hat and cane, and hastened to the grand master of the palace, to tell him what had occurred. The grand master wished to judge for himself of this little prodigy. He was astonished, and at once obtained from the Landgrave permission for Mina to appear at the court theatre, in the oratorio of Master Cornelius.

The representation was to take place the next day. There was no time to lose in preparing a

proper costume. Fortunately, angels are not so exacting with regard to their toilet as the daughters of the earth. A white robe and wings suffice for them. Wilhelmina and Bertha spent part of the night in making the long white robe; the theatre furnished the wings, and a circlet of gold surmounted by a star. When Mina was dressed in her new costume, she was lovely ; and Cornelius declared that if she presented herself thus at the gates of Paradise, Saint Peter himself would take her for an angel returning from a journey.

That evening, to the great amazement of the neighborhood, one of the court carriages stopped before the door of Cornelius, and carried to the theatre the precentor and all his family. On the way, Cornelius gave Mina some last instructions, and anxiously inquired if she were afraid.

“ Afraid ! and why ? ”

Cornelius was astonished and delighted with this reply ; for he, poor man, felt strange, cold chills come over him whenever he thought of

the double ordeal that he had to submit to on this memorable evening.

The solemn moment came at last. The hall was brilliant with lights and splendid toilettes. All the court were in full dress. As soon as the Landgrave and his family were installed in their box, Master Cornelius, after throwing a rapid glance over his orchestra, raised his *bâton*, and the orchestra began the overture. It was given in good style, and well received.

The curtain then rose on a scene representing the country of Judea at night. Shepherds were sleeping on the ground near their flocks. The calm of Oriental night was well marked by the introductory chords. Suddenly the whole scene was illuminated, and a celestial choir was heard. The shepherds awake, and express their terror, when a cloud opened, and revealed a beautiful angel clothed in a long white tunic, and holding in her hand an olive-branch. It was Mina. The whole audience applauded this

charming apparition. Little by little silence was restored, and became so complete, that one could have heard the beating of the worthy Cornelius' heart. Wilhelmina, Bertha, and Frederic seemed turned to stone in their box. Mina alone was calm. She sang her famous solo in a manner so simple and grand, her voice was so pure and sympathetic, that the audience was delighted, enthusiastic. The Landgrave himself gave the signal for applause ; and clapping of hands and frantic hurrahs resounded through the hall. The orchestra rose, the shepherds, the angels joined in the ovation, — even the demons, unmindful of their *rôle*, yelled out their bravos in honor of the angel who had just announced to them that their reign was over. The solo was encored, and the second rendering was as successful as the first. Quiet was finally restored, and the oratorio ended with a grand chorus, in which heaven, earth, and hell all united to insure the triumph of Cornelius.

The performance over, the chamberlain on

duty came forward to fetch Cornelius and Mina to the Landgrave. The latter complimented the precentor on his oratorio, and especially on his little *protégé*, whom he took on his knee and caressed.

"It is usual for mortals," he said to her, "to implore the protection of angels ; but if a poor sovereign like me can be so favored of heaven as to render any service to one of its most beautiful angels, deign to command me, and I shall be only too happy to obey."

"O my lord," replied Mina in a supplicating voice, "if you could only restore me to my father and mother !"

In the midst of this brilliant court, where all were doing her honor, little Mina thought only of the poor cabin where Wolf and Marguerite were mourning for their lost child.

The Landgrave requested Mina to tell him her story, which she did with so touching a simplicity, that everybody was charmed and moved to tears.

"My little angel," said the Landgrave, "I will restore you to your father and mother, or lose my crown. Here," he added, drawing from his finger a diamond ring, "keep this as a keepsake from me."

All the lords and ladies of the court wanted to kiss little Mina, and each made her a present. A casket was required to hold this harvest of jewels. In those days, the great lords were very generous.

In the mean while, the family and friends of Cornelius waited impatiently for their return, and when they appeared, received them with every demonstration of joy. Mina, transported, threw her arms around Wilhelmina, and her kind companions, Bertha and Frederic. She showed them her presents from the fine ladies of the court, and begged them to choose from them any thing they liked. Cornelius objected.

"Do not these jewels belong to me?"

"Certainly, my child."

"Very well, then, I have the right to do what I please with them."

"That is perfectly just" said an old professor of Roman law, taking a pinch of snuff: "ownership is the right of using and abusing, *utendi et abutendi*."

Mina put around Bertha's neck a lovely pearl necklace; she gave a pretty watch to Frederic, and clasped on the arm of Wilhelmina the richest bracelet in her casket. This little impromptu festival was delightful from its gayety and good-humor. It did not break up until midnight; and, when the children were in bed, Cornelius said to his wife, —

"Come, my wife, let us thank God. This has been a happy day."



CHAPTER XV.



HE Landgrave did not forget his promise, as is too often the case with sovereigns. The next morning, he directed his prime minister to publish in the government journal, and in all the cities, towns, and villages of the duchy, a reward of fifty florins to any one who could find the parents of a little girl called Mina, stolen from her home three years before by gypsies.

Incited by the reward, a number of false Wolfs and Marguerites presented themselves, but the image of her parents was too deeply graven on Mina's heart for her to be deceived by so gross an imposture; and these wicked people

were obliged to depart hastily amid the hootings of the populace, and were very lucky in not being sent to prison.

Of the steps taken to find them, Mina's parents knew nothing. The village in which they lived was very far from any great centre, with no way of communication, and inhabited by poor people who did not know how to read or write; so no news, no journal even, penetrated into their solitude.

Since their dear child was taken away, Wolf and Marguerite were more isolated than ever. Marguerite had nearly become crazy with grief. She wandered about the country like a soul in pain, and took no rest day or night. We never have peace when we question and will not submit to the will of God. Wolf, on the contrary, was an example of most perfect resignation. He was a Christian hero, without knowing it. When thoughts of his beloved child came to shake his courage, he would quit his work, go

to the church, pray earnestly, and return consoled. One day, — it was the anniversary of the birth of Mina, — poor Wolf was more than usually depressed, from seeing before him the empty chair of his child. Throwing himself on his knees, he prayed long and fervently ; and his prayer, like all prayers that come from the heart, was heard.

That night his good angel sent him a dream. Mina appeared to him, resplendent in beauty. "Father," she said, "do not weep: I will soon return to thee." Wolf awoke, his bosom filled with ineffable joy, and related his dream to Marguerite, lying sleepless by his side.

"What folly!" rejoined Marguerite. "We shall never see her again, — God has forsaken us."

"Wife," replied Wolf, "do not talk so. God wishes to try us; but he is good, and, if we pray with fervor, he will restore to us our child."

CHAPTER XVI.



SEVERAL years passed away, and, in spite of the active exertions of the Landgrave's police, Mina's parents had not yet been found. But Providence, who loves to confound the pride of the powerful, sometimes makes use of the most unexpected and common means to serve his ends.

Mina had now reached her fifteenth year. The lovely child had become a tall and beautiful young girl. She still cherished the memory of her parents; only time, the great consoler, had softened the bitterness of her regret, while imparting to her sweet face a tinge of melancholy,

which, like in certain heads of Leonardo da Vinci, gave to her beauty the additional charm of mystery.

Thanks to her remarkable genius, and to Cornelius' instructions, Mina had attained to a high degree of perfection in her art. She knew by heart all the works of the great masters, and sang, and played on the harpsichord like a Saint Cecilia. Fugue and counter-point were no secrets to her. She was also familiar with ancient and modern literature; she had studied universal history, geography, a little of astronomy and natural science; and had received, above all, that moral and religious education which is only developed in the homes of truly Christian families, and without which all knowledge is fruitless.

At this time, Italy was considered the classic land of the fine arts, especially of music. There was no salvation for the musician who had not made a tour to Italy. It was like the pilgrimage to Mecca to the Mussulman. The Landgrave,

who was determined his *protégé* should have every advantage, begged Cornelius to accompany Mina on a trip to Italy, of which he defrayed royally all the expense. After travelling slowly through this marvellous country, in a perpetual state of enchantment, Cornelius and Mina returned to Germany by way of the Tyrol. They travelled post, by short stages. One day the postilion lost his way, and, in trying to find it, he came on to a high table-land, commanding an extensive prospect. Suddenly Mina uttered a cry of joy.

“My village! my village! that is it! I know it! There is our little church, and there, at the right, our house! John,” she said to the postilion, “follow this road, and it will bring you out to the highway.” After some difficulty in getting over stones and brambles, the post-chaise reached a road which, though better, did not reflect much honor on the engineers of the period. Poor Mina’s heart throbbed with joy at the



“Suddenly Mina uttered a cry of joy: ‘My Village, my Village!’” — PAGE 112.

thought of seeing so soon her loving and good parents. As for Cornelius, he did not dare trust yet to so providential an accident,—when Mina saw, a few steps off, on the side of the road, an old woman, trudging along laboriously, aided by a cane, and bearing on her back a fagot of dry sticks.

“It is Mother Fritz!” she instantly cried.

She stopped the post-chaise, and called out,—

“Mother Fritz! Mother Fritz!”

The old woman turned, astounded.

“Is it possible you don’t know me, Mother Fritz?”

“Alas, no, my fine young lady!”

“I am little Mina.”

“O God, is it possible!” ejaculated the old woman, letting fall her bundle of sticks.

Mina sprang from the carriage and threw her arms around Mother Fritz. A thought flashed through her mind, filling her with dread. What if her parents should be dead! She did not dare

question Mother Fritz, who, seeming to divine what was passing in her mind, said, clasping her hands, —

“How happy Father Wolf and poor Marguerite will be!”

“Let us go to them directly,” replied Mina, quickly, her heart relieved of a terrible weight. She made the old woman get into the carriage, with her fagot; she overwhelmed her with questions, and shed many tears at hearing of the grief of her father and mother. They rapidly approached her village, though not quick enough for Mina, so anxious was she to throw herself into the arms of her dear parents, and to say to them, “It is I — Mina, your little girl, who has never ceased to love you.”

Cornelius now suggested to Mina that too abrupt a disclosure of her identity might be fatal to the worthy couple, and that it would be better to prepare them gently for the news, as great joy kills, like great grief. It was arranged, therefore,

that Cornelius and Mother Fritz should go in first, while Mina remained out of sight in the post-chaise, until they should call her. But she had not the patience to wait. Scarcely had Cornelius and Mother Fritz entered the house, when she sprang from the carriage, and glided down a little pathway of the garden which led to the back of the house. Looking in through the half-open door, she saw her parents; and her tears flowed freely at the traces which age and sorrow had imprinted on both their faces.

"Ah, sir," Wolf was just saying to Cornelius, "the Lord has sorely tried us; but his designs are inscrutable, and we must worship him on our knees."

"Take courage," answered Cornelius: "misfortune does not always dog the steps of such honest people; you will see your child again, and sooner than you think for."

"May the Lord hear you, sir! If you only knew how sweet she was! It is both a joy and

grief to think of her. Wait a moment, there is a song she was never tired of hearing me sing, — the story of a shepherd who possessed nothing in the world but a goat, which he loved dearly, and had just lost. Fancy his grief;” and Wolf began to sing, in a tremulous voice, —

“Un jour, la chèvre a disparu —
Il court, il pleure : avez-vous vu
Ma Joliette,
Ma chevrette?
Si je ne puis la découvrir,
Hélas ! je n’ai plus qu’à mourir.”

Wolf stopped, overcome by his emotion. Suddenly a voice, fresh and pure, and full of feeling, continued the interrupted song, —

“Ne pleure pas, petit berger,
Le vilain loup n’a pas mangé
Ta Joliette,
Ta chevrette.
Oui, le bon Dieu te la rendra,
Et ta voix encore redira :

Hop là, sautez, ma chevrette,
Joliette ;
Hop là, sautez, mes amours,
Toujours."

Wolf and Marguerite listened, a prey to strange agitation, — when the door flew open, and Mina threw herself into Marguerite's arms, crying out, —

"My mother! my mother!"

Marguerite gazed at her for a moment, bewildered; then, as though she had at last recognized in the features of the young girl the image of her beloved child, she uttered a piercing cry, pressed Mina to her heart, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping. Poor Wolf had fallen on his knees, thanking God. Mina, seeing him in this humble posture, and moved with respect and tenderness, knelt down before him.

"My good father!" she said, in a thrilling voice.

Wolf raised her, and held her long against his

heart in a mute ecstasy. After the first transports were over, Mina presented Cornelius to her parents, saying, —

“This is my saviour, my benefactor, my second father.”

Wolf and Marguerite took his hands, which they bathed with their tears.

Mother Fritz had gone to spread the good news through the village. Young and old left their work to go to see the little Mina; but they stopped surprised and abashed before so tall and fine a young lady. Mina recognized them all, called them by their names, and found a pleasant word to say to each. Then the old curé, who had not been the last to come and share the joy of these worthy people, stood up and said, —

“The hand of the Lord is visible in this, my friends. Let us all go to the church to give thanks.”

Cornelius and Mina arranged a surprise for the assembly. Cornelius played the organ, and Mina sang the famous solo of Christmas night. The

simple peasants, who had never before heard such beautiful music, fancied themselves transported to Paradise. Afterward, the old curé made his parishioners a short address upon the vigilance of Providence, who always watches over his children, and conducts them to the end, but by mysterious roads. After the service, the curé took Cornelius and all the Wolf family back to his parsonage, and kept them there to dinner. At dessert, Mina related her story, which was interrupted by the tears of the listeners.

It was arranged that Wolf and Marguerite should accompany Mina back to Darmstadt on the following day. The latter gave all the money left from the expense of the journey, to be distributed to the poor of the parish; and forced Mother Fritz to accept two florins, to pay her, she said, smilingly, for the apple she had stolen from her. All the village gathered together to witness the departure of the travellers, and called down upon them the blessings of Heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.



FORTNIGHT afterward, the two families met together at Darmstadt. The Landgrave had Wolf and Marguerite presented to him, and received them most kindly. He handed to Mina a purse of fifty florins.

"I promised them," he said, "to the person who should find your parents; so these fifty florins belong to you."

"It is Providence who has worked this miracle, your majesty! these fifty florins belong to the poor."

"God preserve me from doing them any wrong, my dear child; but, distributed by your hand, their

value will be increased twofold. Wolf," added he, turning toward the tailor, who was very much abashed at finding himself face to face with so grand a personage, "one of the keepers of my park has just died. I give you his place."

"O my lord, how good you are !" said Mina, kissing with respectful affection the hand of the Landgrave.

"My child," replied he, smiling, "sovereigns ought to be a little better than ordinary people, if they hope to be pardoned for their grandeur."

A few days afterward, Wolf, Marguerite, and Mina were installed in a pretty lodge which the Landgrave had ordered to be renovated, and which was furnished with an elegant simplicity. Wolf looked upon himself as the happiest of fathers and of tailors. The dream of his life was accomplished. His new position permitted him to work henceforth only for the poor. Marguerite, become almost a *bourgeoise*, indulged occasionally in some little vanities ; but the memory

of what she had suffered, quickly brought her back to reason.

Mina often thought of the gypsies, those terrible companions of her childhood, and especially of Petrolino, her friend and protector. The little cloak, cut off from the famous senatorial mantle, which the kind fellow had given her, she kept in her own room, among her crowns of laurel and of gold, — glorious trophies of the triumphs of the young artist. She could not look at this little mantle without being moved, and would say to herself, —

“Poor Petrolino ! what has become of thee ? Will God never permit me to prove to thee my gratitude ?”

This remembrance was almost a remorse for Mina, so much she feared to be ungrateful. Morning and evening at her prayers, after invoking blessings upon her parents and benefactors, she never forgot the name of the player on the mandolin. God at last heard her prayers.

One day, when Mina visited the hospital to carry to the poor her alms and comforting words, she noticed hanging on the wall, behind one of the beds, an old mandolin without strings, and a worn-out mantle, jagged and covered with stains and mud, but still showing signs that it had once been of a beautiful scarlet. It was indeed the old mantle borrowed, twenty years back, by Rabba from a Venetian senator, but how stripped of its pristine splendor! Mina uttered a cry of surprise, and leant over the sick man. Alas! he, like the Venetian mantle, looked little like himself. He was a spectre, a phantom, a shade.

“Petroliño!” said Mina with a trembling voice.

Hearing this name, the sick man raised himself up, and fixed his eyes, bright with fever, for some time on the young girl; then he exclaimed suddenly, —

“La Biondina!”

"Yes, it is I, La Biondina, my poor Petrolino."

"Saint Mark and the Madonna be praised!" rejoined he, clasping his hands; for, since his illness, Petrolino had returned to the religion of his infancy, just as a lost child in the midst of a forest at night dreams of his parents, and calls upon them for succor.

"I have seen my Biondina again, now I can die."

"Do not talk so, Petrolino."

"Bah, what can a poor devil like me do better?" said he, with a little return of his old careless gayety.

"Put your trust in God. He will restore you to health."

"Health! what for? 'Of what use are nuts when we have no teeth to crack them with?' as old Rabba used to say."

"Petrolino, you took pity on a poor abandoned child; when she shivered with cold at night on the damp ground, you covered her with your

cloak ; you courageously defended her against wolves, and wicked people even more cruel : the child has grown up ; in spite of absence, she has kept the memory of your friendship and devotion warm in her heart, and she says to you to-day, ‘Petroline, La Biondina is rich,—you are rich : La Biondina is happy,—she wishes you to be happy too.’”

The deep feeling which animated the young girl gave to her naturally sweet voice an inexpressible charm. Petroline listened with delight, and thought it was a delicious dream.

“La Biondina is dead,” he said to himself : “it is her dear spirit come to visit me.”

“Come, come, take heart, my good Petroline. I hope you will soon be able to leave this wretched hospital.”

“Thou art going to leave me already ?” said Petroline with visible concern.

“Yes ; but only to busy myself about you. I will come to see you every day.”

This promise quieted the troubled mind of the sick man : he took Mina's hand, put it respectfully to his lips, and a grateful tear fell from his eyes burning with fever.

Mina recommended her *protégé* to the physician of the hospital, gave some money, which never hurts any thing, to the infirmary, and hastened away to tell her parents and friends of her good fortune.

The next day, Wolf accompanied Mina in her visit to the hospital. He was anxious to see the devoted protector of his dear child, and express his gratitude. Petrolino seemed more natural than he did the evening before. The fever had left him ; which shows that joy and hope are the most skilful physicians in the world. He was awaiting Mina with the greatest impatience, and welcomed Wolf as well as her, in the most affecting manner.

While Petrolino and Mina talked over old times together, Wolf was pursued by one idea.

He said to himself, "How can I prove my gratitude to this worthy man?" In turning over this problem in his mind, his eyes happened to fall on the poor old clothes of the gypsy, which, had there been such an institution as a hospital for worn-out garments, would undoubtedly have had the right to enter therein without favor. A smile of satisfaction immediately lit up Wolf's face. He had found a way.

Meanwhile, conversation did not languish between Mina and Petrolino, who told each other all the great events which had occurred since their separation. Mina's story and her triumphs deeply interested the player of the mandolin, who exclaimed with enthusiasm, —

"Old Zara was not mistaken: you have a star!"

"Now, Petrolino, it is your turn."

"After your departure," said Petrolino, "ill-luck never quitted us. Old Rabba began the dance: he died from eating too hearty a supper. He was fond of goose, and it was that which killed him.

Makitou was elected in his place, in spite of old Zara, who predicted all sorts of misfortunes. She was right: they fell on us like hail. While Rabba was alive, Makitou did not dare to give himself up too much to his disorderly tastes for robbery and pillage. When he became master, he let the bridle go free, and knew no restraint. What blows have I not had, because I had courage to tell him the truth! He was a little afraid of me, and never commanded me to commit any dishonesty, for he knew that I would disobey him. One night I was awakened by cries, and saw Makitou coming in, with a casket hidden under his cloak. There was blood on his hands. He said to us in a rough, gloomy voice, "Fly, as quickly as you can, if you want to keep your ears!" But the police were after us; we were all arrested, handcuffed, and thrown into jail. Makitou was condemned to death, and hung. Old Zara's prediction came true. Finding no charge against me, I was released after six months. I

left the prison with my stringless mandolin, an empty stomach and purse, having lost friends, companions, health, and spirits, — all that sustains life. Hunted from place to place as a vagabond, I dragged myself as far as Darmstadt, where I fell fainting at the gate of the hospital: for three days I had eaten nothing!”

“Poor Petrolino!” said Mina, whom this recital had deeply affected.

“Now, my little Biondina, you know the rest.”



CHAPTER XVIII.



HANKS to his robust constitution, and to proper nourishment, of which he had more need than drugs; and thanks above all to the visits of his dear Biondina, Petrolino was very soon on his legs. Upon the day fixed for his leaving the hospital, Wolf arrived early, with a big bundle under his arm. He found Petrolino awake and looking piteously at his poor clothes.

"I shall never dare to appear before Biondina's friends in such hideous rags," he said to himself.

Intercourse with Mina, Wolf, Cornelius, and his charming family, had wrought a happy change in Petrolino's ideas. He was ashamed now of

his old gypsy career, and already wanted to lead a quieter and more honest life. Wolf surprised him absorbed in these reflections; divining his thoughts, he opened, without a word, his big bundle, and took out linen and a complete suit of clothes, which he spread silently on the bed. Petrolino did not dare believe his eyes.

"Father Wolf," said he, with a choked voice, "are these fine clothes for me?"

"I rather think so," said the tailor, with a smile full of pleasant mischief.

Petrolino examined this superb costume, piece by piece, with a childish joy; then came tears; and, pressing Wolf's hand, he said only this one word, —

"Thanks!"

Wolf was paid a hundred-fold.

When Mina and Marguerite, accompanied by Cornelius, entered the hospital ward, Petrolino had finished his toilette.

"My dear Petrolino, you are magnificent!" ex-

claimed Cornelius, "thanks to our friend Wolf."

"I understand now why we have not seen you for eight days," said Mina. "Dear father, how good you are!" and she kissed him.

"You have wrought a masterpiece, my good Wolf; and you have not spared the cloth," added Cornelius, looking at Petrolino, who seemed to swim in his clothes.

"If I made the garments loose, Mr. Doctor, I had a purpose in it," replied Wolf, with an arch smile. "Our friend Petrolino will soon grow fat, thanks to Marguerite's good fare, and yours also, Mr. Doctor."

"I did not think of that, Father Wolf. I beg your honor's pardon."

Petrolino, quitting the hospital, took away his old mantle and mandolin. "They have always been my companions in misfortune," he said, smiling, "and one must not be ungrateful to old friends."

Petrolino showed himself worthy of the interest

taken in him by Mina and her friends: he soon shook off what remained of the old man, of the vagabond and the gypsy, and testified to his dear Biondina until he died, that instinctive and absolute devotion which the dog alone bears to his master.

As for Mina, she became the greatest prima donna of Germany; but fame and fortune did not spoil her. She was ever modest and charitable; and, if her name was hailed with enthusiasm by frenzied admirers, it was also blessed in secret by the poor and unfortunate, to whom she was, until her death, an angel of consolation.















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